Community Progress Network's Education Roundtable:
*Working Together to Help our Children Succeed*
August 23rd, 2018 from 5PM-9PM

Final Report
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Executive Summary
The Community Progress Network (CPN) is a coalition of Arlingtonians committed to advancing our community’s vision of inclusivity and diversity. Comprised of more than 30 non-profit, government and civic leaders, CPN works to engage, educate and advocate for equitable programs, policies, and investments in Arlington. Recognizing that the voices of low-income Arlingtonians often go unheard, CPN launched a series of facilitated roundtable discussions focused on key service areas essential to every individual and family. The CPN Roundtables provide an opportunity for community residents to share challenges and identify opportunities for strengthening services and supports. The first of four roundtables took place on August 23, 2018 at the Women’s Club of Arlington, focused on the theme, Working Together to Help Our Children Succeed.

Removing barriers to participation and creating a welcoming environment for 58 participants was a key priority. Volunteers included translators to support the full participation of Spanish, Arabic, Amharic, Mongolian and English speakers, and childcare was provided. 12 small group tables were organized both by language spoken and the ages of the participants’ children. Two tables focused on adult education opportunities and one was set aside for middle and high school participants. Table hosts included Katie Cristol, Chair Arlington County Board; Christian Dorsey, Vice-Chair, Arlington County Board; Arlington School Board Members: Nancy Van Doren and Barbara Kanninen as well as senior staff leaders from Arlington Public Schools, Arlington County Government, and non-profit service providers.

The evening kicked off with a family style dinner allowing participants and table volunteers to get acquainted and build trust to encourage more open conversation. After introductions, facilitators led participants at each table in a discussion about what is working well for them and their children. A second round of discussion explored challenges and barriers, giving participants the opportunity to raise concerns and difficulties they had experienced. The third and final round focused on identifying possible strategies (big or small) that might make a difference. Each round of table discussion was followed by a full-room “harvest” time to uncover emerging common concerns and cross cutting issues.

Notetakers at each table recorded closely the comments and concerns of participants. CPN will publish the full report as well as all table notes on its website, www.communityprogressnetwork.org.

Overall participants in the roundtable were generally happy with education in Arlington. Although, some pointed at areas for improvement, as with anything, participants were grateful and felt that Arlington Public Schools are providing a strong and excellent education for their children.

One of the most energetic discussions of the night proved to be focused on identifying opportunities. Admittedly, participants in these conversations may not always have been aware of restrictions or resource constraints that could inhibit implementation of the recommendations below. However, we encourage community leaders, organizations and County agencies to take seriously these challenges and the strategies proposed by resident voices. Many of these ideas are creative suggestions to respond to felt needs in our community. Highlights from ideas generated by participants to address challenges, promote equity and improve outcomes are outlined below:

Inclusion and Diversity

Multi-Lingual Information Boards: Having schools post basic information in the schools in multiple languages.

Multi-Lingual Parent Programs: Ensuring that parents who do not speak English as their native language are able to access school programs and community services.
Cultural Competency Training: Increasing cultural competence training for school and county staff—as well as for other community members, including students and parents.

Communication and Engagement

More Programming During Parent/Teacher Conferences: Asking schools to offer additional programs, flyers, or other information (on drugs, technology safety, etc.) to parents as they attend conferences.

Administrative Office Hours for Parents: Planning for principals, assistant principals, or other school wide staff to have dedicated times for walk in office hours.

Welcoming Programs for New Families: Streamlining the registration process, offering parent trainings, and developing a buddy system for new families and students to help them adjust to the new system and learn about all of the opportunities the system offers.

Student and Community Well-Being

Groups to Walk with Students: Organizing groups of parents in neighborhoods where many children walk to school to walk with students, particularly to support parents who may not be able to be home when it is time for students to go to and from school.

Increase Stress Management Resources: Offering more support for students who are feeling overwhelmed with school or issues outside of school.

Increase Supervision: Having increased adult supervision of social times at during school, after school, and community programming to assist with monitoring bullying behavior.

Think Through Scheduling: Considering the impact of the schedules when providing programs, particularly those designed to help working residents.

Support for Bus Drivers: Providing all bus drivers, not just those for students with special needs, with an assistant on the bus to help monitor student behavior.

Healthier Food: Changing food services to allow more consistent, appealing healthy options for all grade levels.

Parent Groups for Gang Prevention: Creating groups and programs to educate parents about potential gang issues, help divert students from joining, and supporting parents whose children have already joined.

Student, Parent and Community Success

Tutoring in multiple languages: Providing tutors able to provide instruction in other languages (Mongolian, Spanish) who could work with the parent and child.

Mentors: Developing a mentorship program, particularly for students who are in any of the “at-risk” categories, to help have another positive adult voice in their lives and find a strong career and life path.

Revive the “Workshop” program: Developing an apprenticeship program for teens.

Expand beyond academics: Ensuring that school days are not solely devoted to getting certain test scores, particularly for middle school and high school ages.
Technology Classes for Parents: Providing trainings for parents related to the devices and programs their children will be using throughout the school year.

Increase Access to School Officials: Provide groups particularly for low-income individuals to help with individual advocacy and increase communication across school offices/staff/administrators, so parents do not have to repeat their story/problem so many times.

Systems Change and Operational Excellence

Incentives for New Daycares: Providing incentives for new and current businesses to provide onsite day care for employees’ children.

Provide IDs for residents: Issuing an ID to residents who lack other identification that they can use to enter the schools and other county programs.

Centralized Systems and Data: Streamlining applications for various programs in the county and schools.

“Arlington Smart Card”: Creating a student/community Smart Card or Arlington Smart Card to centralize access and eligibility across systems.

Reduce Fees for Families with Multiple Kids: Providing a sliding scale for participation fees when a family has multiple children, particularly for those who also qualify for free and reduced lunch.

Transportation and bus options: Facilitating greater assistance with transportation, including bus services.

Overall, the event allowed community leaders to see areas of concern with suggested actions, but also areas where people are happy and programs that can be continued to grow. Beyond those who participated in the event, the hope is that this information will help leaders recognize the needs, desires and strengths of all members of the Arlington community.
Introduction: What are CPN Roundtables

The Community Progress Network (CPN) is a coalition of Arlingtonians committed to our community’s vision of inclusivity and diversity. The coalition is focused on educating our community and advocating for equitable programs, policies, and investments in Arlington.

CPN will host a series of CPN Roundtables focused on key service areas that are essential elements for every individual and family in Arlington. The CPN Roundtables will provide an opportunity for community residents with diverse backgrounds and experiences to share challenges and identify opportunities for strengthening services and supports across the County.

These series of roundtables have several objectives:

- To empower participants to emerge feeling valued and heard
- To help participants expand their input and find additional information and pathways for participation
- To identify areas of opportunity for CPN and other leaders in our community to continue to engage on a deeper level to make positive change

The first of four roundtables occurred August 23rd at the Women’s Club of Arlington focused on ‘working together to help our children succeed’. The major goal of the event was to provide low income Arlingtonians a way to share their experiences, concerns, and opinions. Members of the CPN worked together to develop the world café structure for the discussion and overall event, always keeping in mind the need for a meaningful, safe, and participant-guided discussion. Various CPN groups were asked to recruit participants with the goal of ensuring a diverse participant pool. With large contributions from AFAC, AHC, VOICE, APAH and Communities in Schools, 104 participants were registered prior to the event.
Working Together to Help our Children Succeed

A. Process
The night of the event, 58 participants arrived, as well as approximately 50 children aged 2-13 who were in a separate room under the supervision of licensed child care providers assisted by volunteers. Other younger children stayed with their parents. The participants were arranged at 11 tables, grouped according to language and age of children. Four tables were conducted in Spanish, with participants grouped according to children’s age. There was also one table conducted in Amharic and one table with a Mongolian translator. Five tables were conducted in English, with some tables focusing on adult education and one table specifically for middle school and high school students.

At each table, there was a table host, facilitator, and at least one note taker. The table host’s role was simply to listen as a high-level representative of the county, schools, or CPN. Table facilitators served to guide the conversation, prompting with questions and redirecting the conversation as necessary to ensure balance in the voices at the table. Notetakers worked to record the conversation as fully as possible and noted any specific areas of concern by participants who may require specific organizations to reach out and follow up on concerns.

The event kicked off with a family style dinner. This allowed for participants and table volunteers to become more comfortable with each other, building trust prior to personal conversations to follow. The discussions began after a welcome from the Master Facilitator, Kathie Panfil (CPN Co-Chair). After introductions, the facilitators led the participants in a discussion about what is working well for them and their children, follow by a “harvest” section, allowing different tables to share-out key points of their discussion. The second round of discussions was about exploring challenges and barriers which gave participants the opportunity to raise the participant’s concerns and difficulties. This second round was also followed by a “harvest” time to seek emerging challenges and concerns; as well as cross cutting issues that were discussed at more than one table. The third and final round concentrated on identifying opportunities for the future, allowing participants to reflect on some of the challenges they shared earlier, and identify an ACTION (big or small) that might help address one of the challenges that were identified and/or shared. As with the other two rounds this ended with a “harvest” section to share those action items as possible strategies to address the challenges and concerns.

At the end of the night, each participant also received a $25 gift card. As well, they confirmed their contact information and were able to provide feedback and request information about specific topics. Overall, the reception of the event appears overwhelmingly positive. CPN partners and senior officials in the room expressed interest in participating in future events. Participants overwhelming rated the event 10/10 (excellent) with no rankings below an 8 indicated on exit surveys.
B. Key Themes from Discussions
B.1 Guided Discussion I: Exploring What's Working Well

After dinner was finished, and the groups had a chance for introductions, the first question explored was “what is working well.” This question was left deliberately open-ended, to highlight all areas participants felt benefited children in Arlington. A major take away from participants and table volunteers was that people were generally happy with their overall experience with education in Arlington. They knew there were areas for improvement, as with anything, but people were grateful and felt that Arlington was providing a strong and excellent education for their children. People were comforted by the idea that Arlington is always trying to do better for its residents.

a. Diversity and language offerings

One of the biggest positives seen across tables was the diversity Arlington has to offer. Participants felt that the diversity benefited their children because it helped people to be more open minded, but also because the emphasis on diversity allows students to access more experiences, especially with opportunities to learn multiple languages and to participate in the immersion programs. One participant specifically noted that her 12-year-old daughter was able to learn 3 languages using the High Intensity Language program. Other participants noted that they appreciated the bilingual nature of the Head Start program their children participated in. The teens in particular noted that they feel that the members of their school are welcoming and did not note any particular concern about exclusion or bullying. Parents also noted that APS did an excellent job supporting students who are or were learning English.

b. Outside of school time activities and programs

In addition to the strong support of languages and diversity, families also felt that the after-school programs offered a lot of support and opportunities for families. This included programs run by APS, as well as separate programs, library programming, and Parks and Recreation programs. Many noted they appreciated how many options students had, and that they were fairly easy to sign up for. Arlington Mill Community Center was noted for having adult classes, computer classes, a rec center for the children, arts and crafts, the farmer’s market, and Spanish classes. The Skate Night for teens was also repeatedly mentioned as a good program to keep children occupied.

Parents particularly noted that these programs allowed them to feel comfortable their children had somewhere safe to be while they were still working. They were also seen as a good place for students to get assistance with homework, and the teens noted that they really appreciated how often they were able to get 1:1 support from teachers with assignments. Some of the separate programs families mentioned were Aspire!, The Fort Henry After School Program, Early
Identification Program through George Mason University, AHC programs, Outdoor Lab, Arabic Program at Kenmore and recreational sports programs.

One group with older students noted that they have found resources and supports from community talks and programs. One student noted that they helped her to gather support from other families and connect with resources to help her son leave a gang he had joined. An outgrowth of this was informal networks that have sprung up amongst parents, particularly for groups who do not speak English as a primary language, to exchange information and support.

c. **College preparation**

Another major theme was that people felt the schools were doing well to prepare students for college. Many families noted that their students had already gone to college after attending APS, and the teens felt like they were well prepared by the schools. One teen appreciated the variety of AP classes she was able to take, even in the tenth grade, and another noted she appreciated the variety of electives she got to take. She felt that these classes allowed her to study the world more deeply and understand things more holistically. Another felt she really benefitted from an internship she completed this summer (referred through PRIME).

d. **School staff**

Additionally, parents had incredibly positive feedback for the teachers and staff members in the schools. They felt that teachers were open to communication with parents, were welcoming to students, even in mid-year transfers, and were invested in the success of students. This especially came out for special education students, with staff and programming at Carlin Springs, Stratford, Kenmore, and Jefferson particularly noted in this area. Participants felt included in the special education process, and that students were given adequate support. Parents also appreciated the economic support they could receive at Claremont and Barcroft in purchasing supplies for their students. The Kenmore principal also received high praise for the work he did when a parent had concerns about bullying. Parents also noted appreciating when teachers gave them ways to contact them directly, especially when a parent had a concern.

One participant also noted the support she received graduating recently from Arlington Community High School, and noted the support from Communities in Schools, tutors, and school staff that supported her to stay on track to graduate.

Families also appreciated the field trip offerings by the schools, noting that it benefited the children as well as parents who attended the trip. Parents also appreciated when they were able to do other volunteering within the schools, to have a better relationship with the schools and to know more about what is going on with their children. The teens also noted they appreciated the number of courses they could select from, and the clubs such as the Virginia Junior Academy of Science Fair, IB Community Project at Jefferson, and the Senior Project at Wakefield.

e. **Adult education and programs for seniors (55+)**

Participants, particularly those with older children, felt there are strong options for adults to learn, particularly related to learning English for speakers of other languages, the Career Center, and programs for seniors. They also felt many opportunities to build community around activism and politics.
B.2 Guided Discussion II – Exploring Challenges and Barriers

The second round of conversation covered challenge areas for families. Major thematic areas that came across the 11 different tables included communication between schools and parents; online safety & screen time; electronic information vs. printed information; cost and availability of afterschool programming; immigration; and safety.

a. Communication

One broader area of concern for participants was the level of communication between schools and parents. These concerns broadly fell into two areas: barriers to receiving information from schools and the type of information passed between schools and parents.

No surprisingly, one major area was language barriers. Largely, the Spanish speaking community has received communications in Spanish, but noted that having translators available (and their presence communicated) for events such as PTA meetings or meetings about college scholarships is key. Often, Spanish speaking parents felt that they were not told about enrichment activities and programs, or that information sessions for parents were only conducted in English. This was also true of knowing about the different options for choice schools and other programs such as the Montessori options for students.

For the Mongolian population, they noted a very big issue with communicating with schools. One school, Hoffman-Boston, has a liaison who speaks Mongolian, but parents at other schools struggle immensely to communicate with school staff. This also translates into being unsure about their students’ progress, inability to monitor homework, or even to know what their students are learning in school.

Outside of language barriers, participants noted a difficulty in being able to communicate with school staff beyond teachers, such as principals and county level officials. They are often told that they need an appointment to meet with these officials, which can be difficult to schedule with work, and makes people feel like their issues are not prioritized.

Participants also felt that schools were increasingly relying solely on electronic communication, which worked for some, but not all, families. Some families preferred other forms of communication, such as texting, WhatsApp, phone calls, or notes home.

Related to the type of information communicated, participants felt that families and schools needed to do more to communicate about the day to day challenges students are facing. Parents felt like they often do not know about the latest trends related to potential drug use and social media influences but felt that schools would have better information they could share to educate parents. For families, being able to share concerns about stress and issues outside of school could help teachers work with students.
Some groups also extended this to the ability of particularly low-income groups to reach any level of authority when they have concerns. Several parents expressed frustration at having to repeat their story with a receptionist or other “gatekeeper” in multiple offices (within school system and beyond) before being able to reach someone who could address their issue.

b. Transportation
A major concern that came up in the discussions centered around transportation. This concern spanned several areas.

One of the first related to students who walk to school. There were concerns about the distance they must walk, especially in busy areas and/or with limited sidewalks. Some participants noted seeing many close calls near schools, and some reported students walking to school actually being hit by cars. There was also concerns about students taking short cuts, possibly through unsafe areas, or parks where people who are using or dealing drugs may try to influence the students.

For buses, there was a concern about the levels of crowding on buses, particularly middle school students. This was also related to the ART buses some students take to school. Many reported that students having been at an ART bus stop that arrived to full to board and having to wait a full half hour for the next bus.

For the school buses, especially those for students with special needs, both parents and drivers reported concerns about not having adequate information about the students to support the students appropriately. A bus driver reported having success when she exchanged contact information with parents, to help them communicate about issues, but noted this was not necessarily common practice. She also noted that parents needed a better, official way to notify about changes to kids’ activities or schedules, such as wanting a friend to come home with them, or an expected change in behavior.

Participants who formerly drove the buses noted that they feel training used to be more robust and could improve, especially regarding student discipline. Some parents felt that the bus drivers are not always friendly, and some hypothesized it might be due to bus drivers feeling ill equipped to work with the students on their route. Other parents shared experiences about students being assigned to “the special needs bus” due to misbehavior, even if they were not students with special needs; they were concerned this practice stigmatizes both the children with special needs and those who do not have such needs, and that these labels can follow children.

There was also a concern about the air conditioning and heating on the buses not be working properly and the impact that had on children in both extreme temperatures.

c. Technology
Participants acknowledged that schools need to use technology, and that it is a benefit that the schools can provide devices to the students. However, there was significant concern about how students are actually using these devices, and the ability for parents to monitor the devices. Largely, parents felt that they were unaware of exactly how students are supposed to be using the devices and felt that they were unable to control their students’ usage and ensure that they were using them for school work when they were supposed to be completing work—in school, during after school times, and at home. Many participants also felt that they did not know enough about how to use different programs, so could not assist their children when they needed
help on a digital assignment. Some also noted concerns about whether technology was always the best way for students to practice and learn skills, especially in math. The teens also noted that it was often hard to switch back and forth between classes that used all technology and classes that used no technology. It made it difficult to establish and practice their study habits.

d. Afterschool Programming
While most parents largely felt that there were lots of options for after school programming, others shared having faced difficulty getting their children into specific programs. Also, the timing of after school programs were a concern. The programs often end at the same time as other work shifts, so parents struggle to make sure students have adequate transportation. This is compounded by programs that are not offered at the schools, and often there are no transportation options other than parents picking up and dropping off students. This can eliminate some of the families, because they do not have the option to leave work or shift hours.

Another concern for afterschool and outside of school time programs, such as summer camps, was the cost. Participants acknowledged the discounts for families who qualify for free and reduced lunch but noted that there were rarely sliding scales for families with multiple children. One participant noted that $100 for a camp was reasonable, but if a family has three children, $300 might be out of reach for that family. There was also frustration around how families must prove their free and reduced lunch status every time they were required to pay for a new activity, field trip, etc. This turned some families away from participation, and often made them feel stigmatized.

Particular concerns were raised about afterschool and summer programs for teens. Families expressed that while there are many offerings for younger students, there are very few opportunities for older students. This is especially true for the summer.

e. Immigration
One of the big concerns related to immigration was parents with undocumented status not being able to fully participate in their child’s education. For example, requiring an ID to enter schools, which participants understood from a safety standpoint, also adds yet another barrier for parents who struggle with work hours and language barriers. Additionally, while participants noted and appreciated programs schools provided to help work with parents who are undocumented, they noted that often parents are hesitant to attend these sessions, as it would identify them as undocumented. One participant noted that she was asked about her status during a conference, and a teacher offered to adopt her son. Overall, participants noted that schools need to ensure that staff is properly equipped to handle these sensitive concerns.

Another area of concern for some participants is the disinformation related to taking advantage of programs such as free and reduced lunch. Some families believe that if their children participate in these programs while the parents are undocumented, their children may later have to pay for the program from their future salaries or receive a reduction in other benefits. This opened a broader concern about the various rumors that are often spread as people are trying to help each other; parents noted that the school system could be a trusted source to help convey accurate information and correct rumors.

f. Safety
Discussions related to student safety covered many issues of concern. Transportation, as described above, was a big concern. Bullying was also an area of common conversation.
Participants noted that it is an increasing conversation but feel there is a lot of work to be done for adults and children to have a better definition of what bullying is, and how it should be properly addressed. There was increased concern when some of the bullying related to race or other identity issues. Others were concerned that children do not feel comfortable approaching adults when they are being bullied, so adults are unaware of the extent of the problem.

Related to this were discussions about supporting students’ emotional and mental health. Teens and parents both noted that school stress starts very early, even as early as elementary school, and students need to be provided ways to manage their stress in and out of school.

Online safety was another big concern for parents. As noted in the technology section, this is also related to parents not feeling like they can understand and/or control what students are doing on devices. They also noted that this can merge into areas relating to bullying, drug use, and gangs.

One group in particular noted concerns about gangs and gang influence. They felt that there could be more done with the schools to communicate concerns between parents and school staff. This also relates to concern about drugs being available near the schools. One participant noted that they also felt that they were unable to go to the police with some of these concerns, feeling that they were the ones being interrogated when they did so, and that their concerns did not matter unless they specifically witnessed an illegal act.

Additionally, many participants requested more communication and information about drugs and alcohol use in general, noting that schools and other groups would have the most up to date information to share with parents.

g. School Supports

It is noteworthy that overcrowding of schools was not seen as an overwhelming concern, but it was noted in some of the conversations, particularly when there was a need to change a child’s school due to safety concerns rather than school choice. Most of the concerns with overcrowding related to keeping classroom sizes small, noting that some schools are more able to do so than others. The teens noted that they felt it mostly in the halls and during lunch and felt like if it continues it could result in an increase in behavior problems in and out of classrooms.

Tutoring opportunities were also discussed as a challenge, but particularly for families who do not predominately use English in the home. Especially for younger students, or students with IEPs, tutoring in their native language could be beneficial, and would also allow the parents to participate more fully.

One group in particular discussed concerns about supporting students with reading comprehension beyond early elementary ages. They noted that after instruction switches from direct reading instruction, some children see a drop in their SOL scores. Parents wondered if there is enough focus on reading skills in late elementary and middle school, and the individual supports for students who are still struggling. Questions were related to how parents can ensure their children are getting the support, and if they need to advocate for testing for their children if they have these concerns. They were also concerned about the immersion program, where the students were taught a subject in Spanish, but assessed on the SOLs in English. This may prevent learning key English vocabulary in subjects such as science or math. Notably, a family who speaks Arabic at home took their child out of the Spanish immersion program due to these
concerns. Some of these concerns also center around families not being sure of what expectations children face at different levels of schooling (elementary, middle and high) to be considered successful and on track.

Another group of parents, whose concerns were echoed by some of the teens, worried about the stress placed on children, even from an early age. This centered around the number of programs children want to participate in, which can be good, but can also leave them little time for homework. The amount of homework was also a concern for some of the families, and the stress and pressure students face related to succeeding academically.

There were also concerns, particularly for high school students, that school counselors are not as available as they should be. Students reported only seeing counselors to schedule classes, and not for support with college applications or other concerns. Parents also felt that they make assumptions about students/parents based on their skin color, language, and culture, which impacts which opportunities they are informed about.

There was also a sense that the school system could be more welcoming and organized for people who are new to the area and APS. They felt they did not know about some of the choices and opportunities and could have made better choices if they were informed earlier about these options. It was suggested to look to Alexandria as a model for this.

h. Other Training and Programs
Participants also noted that there is a lack of services for those outside of the traditional K-12 schooling. It is commonly noted that childcare and preschool slots are difficult to obtain, and that was echoed by the participants. Many parents also noted a wish for more Montessori options within the traditional schools. Specifically related to the Virginia Preschool Initiative, it was noted that the program is oftentimes too far away from where the people live, making it difficult to attend even if a slot becomes available in the program.

There was also discussion about inadequate technical and vocational training options for people who choose not to pursue a college degree, or are looking to obtain training later in life, including some parents. This also extends to supporting parents who may need support in their native language as well as English.

B.3 Identifying Opportunities for the Future
The last round of discussion had tables think of possible strategies to some of the problems they heard. The shared ideas covered a range of topics. All ideas discussed are noted below, organized by central themes: (1) Inclusion and diversity; (2) Student, Parent, and Community Well-being; (3) Student and Community Success; and (4) Systems Change and Operational Strategies

Inclusion and Diversity

Multi-Lingual Information Boards: Having schools post basic information in the schools in multiple languages, especially information about the availability of translators to assist in communication.

Multi-Lingual Parent Programs: Ensuring that parents who do not speak English as their native language are able to access school programs and community services, with a special focus on PTA and programs about scholarships. Suggestions included bringing in parents of students who have completed these programs to assist the parents going through the programs.
Cultural Competency Training: Increasing cultural competence training for school and county staff—as well as for other community members, including students and parents. The focus of these should be a variety of identity issues, but also include students with special needs. This should include all adults who interact with children, such as bus drivers and school support staff.

Communication and Engagement

More Programming During Parent/Teacher Conferences: Asking schools to offer additional programs, flyers, or other information (on drugs, technology safety, etc.) to parents as they attend conferences. This is especially useful for parents who work long hours and have already taken time off work for the conferences.

Administrative Office Hours for Parents: Planning for principals, assistant principals, or other school wide staff to have dedicated times for walk in office hours. Ideally, these should cover as many days of the week and times of the day as possible. This would allow parents to walk in and address concerns immediately or know that someone is available via phone.

Welcoming Programs for New Families: Streamlining the registration process, offering parent trainings, and developing a buddy system for new families and students to help them adjust to the new system and learn about all of the opportunities the system offers. It was suggested to look at Alexandria, VA and Westchester County, NY for examples on how this has been done in those localities.

Student and Community Well-Being

Groups to Walk with Students: Organizing groups of parents in neighborhoods where many children walk to school to walk with students, particularly to support parents who may not be able to be home when it is time for students to go to and from school. Also helps to build community relationships between parents of students going to the same schools and programs.

Increase Stress Management Resources: Offering more support for students who are feeling overwhelmed with school or issues outside of school. Suggestions included stress-reducing activities during lunch, a meditation/quiet/peace room, and ensuring students know how to access mental health supports within the school.

Parent Groups for Gang Prevention: Creating groups and programs to educate parents about potential gang issues, help divert students from joining, and supporting parents whose children have already joined.

Increase Supervision: Having increased adult supervision of social times at schools, especially lunch and recess, to monitor for bullying.

Think Through Scheduling: Considering the impact of the schedules when providing programs, particularly those designed to help working residents. For example, not having summer camp on Fridays was a big concern for many parents, as was the timing of extended day for parents who work later shift or multiple jobs.

Support for Bus Drivers: Providing all bus drivers, not just those for students with special needs, with an assistant on the bus to help monitor student behavior. Bus drivers should also get more information about the students they are serving, particularly those with any behavioral or emotional concerns. Bus drivers also felt that increased communication between them and families, particularly those serving students with special needs, could help improve everyone’s experience. An example of this is what is done in Fairfax County. In Fairfax, students with special needs are required to have a note pinned to their
jacket on the first day of school with details about the kids’ needs, what to do, parents’ info, etc. Fairfax drivers get more information about the kids and their needs.

**Healthier Food** Changing food services to allow more consistent, appealing healthy options for all grade levels. One idea was for schools to have vegetable gardens, where the students might have an increased desire to eat something that they helped grow.

**Student, Parent and Community Success**

*Tutoring in multiple languages* Providing tutors able to provide instruction in other languages (Mongolian, Spanish) who could work with the parent and child. This concern came particularly from participants who have very limited English skills but wanted to be informed and able to assist their children with school work. They thought schools or other organizations (who could possibly use the library) could be sources.

*Mentors* Developing a mentorship program, particularly for students who are in any of the “at-risk” categories, to help have another positive adult voice in their lives and find a strong career and life path. This was particularly mentioned for students who are in foster care, who could use the extra consistency in their lives, and the mentors could also assist the parents with extra support and information.

*Revive the “Workshop” program* Developing an apprenticeship program for teens. Participants remembered there used to be a program focused on job skills that allowed teens to apprentice in the afternoon. There are some aspects of this through the Career Center, but the programs need to be expanded and offered to teens who are still in high school.

*Expand beyond academics* Ensuring that school days are not solely devoted to getting certain test scores, particularly for middle school and high school ages. This includes providing classes related to life skills (taxes, job applications) and mental health support, particularly in managing stress. Also, ensuring that all students and families know how to access mental health supports in the schools.

*Technology Classes for Parents* Providing trainings for parents related to the devices and programs their children will be using throughout the school year could be helpful to increase the parents’ ability to assist and monitor the technology use. These could also expand into trainings about how to use some of the online systems (peachjar, grade systems, etc), online safety for children, and basic technology usage.

*Increase Access to School Officials* Provide groups particularly for low-income individuals to help with individual advocacy and increase communication across school offices/staff/administrators, so parents do not have to repeat their story/problem so many times.

**Systems Change and Operational Excellence**

*Incentives for New Daycares* Providing incentives for new and current businesses to provide onsite day care for employees’ children.

*Provide IDs for Residents* Issuing an ID to residents who lack other identification that they can use to enter the schools and other community services. It was suggested that the school system should be able to issue the parent ID in conjunction with the student ID. It was also suggested that schools allow parents to use passports or other identification from their home country to enter the school.

*Centralized Systems and Data* Streamlining applications for various community and school programs. Some suggested having one application for “scholarships” for all APS trips, camp, recreation, and after
school programs, transportation, and free and reduced lunches. Others suggested having this information imbedded into identification cards.

“Arlington Smart Card”: Creating a student/community Smart Card or Arlington Smart Card to centralize access and eligibility across systems. This “smart card” could help decrease costs and increase access to various services and programs. It could be a common card that could be utilized on buses, at the library, for lunch money, or other county services. This could be modelled on DC’s “One card.” The “smart card” could include a code for free and reduced meals so parents and students don’t need to keep showing the required letter every time they apply for a benefit.

Reduce Fees for Families with Multiple Kids: Providing a sliding scale for participation fees when a family has multiple children, particularly for those who also qualify for free and reduced lunch.

Transportation and Bus Options: Facilitating greater assistance with transportation. Participants recommended increasing the number of buses during the school year, during summer programs, and to assist with afterschool programming. They also suggested coordinating with city buses to ensure extra buses run during school transportation times and providing teens with bus pass discounts for the ART buses.
**Thematic Areas by Key Findings**

The table below summarizes the overall conversations at the tables, highlighting the most discussed areas. Conversations highlighted in green were considered mostly positive trends. Areas in yellow had mixed trends, with some positive and some critical remarks. The blue areas are areas of weakness. The last column indicates the letters that connect to the proposed strategies.

**Table Key:**
- Largely positive area
- Mix of positives and concerns for this area
- Largely area of concern

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Key topic</th>
<th>Key topic</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student and community success</td>
<td>Supportive, helpful teachers.</td>
<td>Supports for ESL and struggling readers</td>
<td>Assistance with tutoring</td>
<td>Enrichment opportunities, such as field trips and parent volunteers</td>
<td>Supports for students and families planning to attend college</td>
<td>Strong Special Education supports</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Engagement</td>
<td>Activities for the community (farmers market, library programs, etc)</td>
<td>Having to document free/reduced lunch status for each separate program</td>
<td>Community talks and programs</td>
<td>Childcare availability and affordability</td>
<td>Offerings for adults who aren't seniors</td>
<td>Focus on vocational and alternative paths to college</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Discussed at 5 tables.</td>
<td>Discussed at 4 tables.</td>
<td>Discussed at 3 tables.</td>
<td>Discussed at 3 tables.</td>
<td>Discussed at 3 tables.</td>
<td>Discussed at 2 tables, receiving strong support during share out portions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student and Community Safety and Well Being</td>
<td>Bullying being widespread and having inconsistent response</td>
<td>Drugs and Alcohol</td>
<td>Mental health supports within schools</td>
<td>Gangs</td>
<td>Online safety</td>
<td>Assisting children in managing stress levels</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Discussed at 6 tables.</td>
<td>Discussed at 5 tables.</td>
<td>Discussed at 4 tables.</td>
<td>Discussed at 4 tables.</td>
<td>Discussed at 3 tables.</td>
<td>Discussed at 3 tables.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication</strong></td>
<td>Consistent communication of information to parents and students, especially about extra opportunities. Discussed at 10 tables.</td>
<td>Communicating with teachers Discussed at 5 tables.</td>
<td>Using multiple modes of communicating, not just relying on one method Discussed at 5 tables.</td>
<td>Communicating with support staff, principals and higher-level staff Discussed at 5 tables.</td>
<td>Informal parent connections through technology (WhatsApp groups) Discussed at 3 tables.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Inclusion and Diversity</strong></td>
<td>Opportunities to learn languages and immersion programs Discussed at 5 tables.</td>
<td>Not having programs and other information offered in multiple languages Discussed at 5 tables.</td>
<td>Barriers to communicating with schools because lacking translation services Discussed at 4 tables.</td>
<td>Difficulties in assisting children with school assignments and tracking their progress Discussed at 3 tables.</td>
<td>Tutoring offered in multiple languages Discussed at 3 tables.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inclusion and Diversity</strong></td>
<td>Support of diversity within the school Discussed at 4 tables.</td>
<td>Identification to enter schools Discussed at 3 tables.</td>
<td>Concerns about utilizing benefits having repercussions later Discussed at 3 tables.</td>
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<td><strong>Transportation</strong></td>
<td>Transportation for summer and after school programs Discussed at 4 tables.</td>
<td>Safety of students walking to school Discussed at 3 tables.</td>
<td>Crowding on buses Discussed at 3 tables.</td>
<td>Difficulties for students using the ART buses Discussed at 3 tables.</td>
<td>Drivers properly trained and supported to service students with special needs Discussed at 3 tables.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Concerns about the amount of time students spend on devices, including for school work</td>
<td>Discussed at 5 tables.</td>
<td>Parents knowing about proper use of technology by students</td>
<td>Discussed at 4 tables.</td>
<td>Providing devices</td>
<td>Discussed at 2 tables, receiving strong support during share out portions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outside of School Time</td>
<td>Number and variety of programs offered by schools and other groups</td>
<td>Discussed at 7 tables.</td>
<td>Appropriate offerings for teens</td>
<td>Discussed at 3 tables.</td>
<td>Timing in consideration of parents who work longer hours and may not have cars</td>
<td>Discussed at 3 tables.</td>
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</table>
**Conclusion**

Given that the main goal of the CPN Roundtables is to provide an opportunity for community residents with diverse backgrounds and experiences to share challenges and identify opportunities for strengthening services and supports across the County, based on the community comments and the enthusiasm of the participants, we arrived at the following conclusions related to the pre-stated objectives for the event.

- To empower participants to emerge feeling valued and heard.

  An overwhelming response from participants, both anecdotally to volunteers and in the surveys, was that this was one of the first times they had felt able to express their opinions and concerns to high level individuals within the county. This was especially true of individuals with language barriers.

- To help participants expand their input and find additional information and pathways for participation.

  Many connections were made between participants and the individuals serving as table volunteers. These pathways for finding additional information and support will be continued by distributing an overview of the report along with key resources from organizations to all participants. Additionally, contact information was secured for all participants, so they can be invited to future roundtables.

- To identify areas of opportunity for CPN and other leaders in our community to continue to engage on a deeper level to make positive change.

  The roundtable structure allowed community leaders to see areas of concern with suggested actions, but also areas where people are happy and programs that can be continued to grow. Beyond those who participated in the event, the hope is that this report, and some in person presentations of the information from the event, will help leaders recognize the needs, desires and strengths of all members of the Arlington community.

Overall, the roundtable met the objectives set for the event, and provided a strong start for the roundtable series.

Other notable reflections on the event:

- Many participants enjoyed the opportunity to build connections with others at their table. This gave them a chance to find people with similar concerns and challenges and grow their community.

- Often, discussions about education focus on students in K-12 and their families, but many of the attendees had older children, or no children, and wanted to share their perspectives on the system. This shows the pride they have in Arlington Schools, but also is a note that groups need to think as broadly as possible when considering their audience.
• Admittedly, participants in these conversations may not always have been aware of restrictions or resource constraints that could inhibit implementation of the recommendations above. However, we encourage community leaders, organizations and County agencies to take seriously these challenges and the strategies proposed by resident voices. Many of these ideas are creative suggestions to respond to felt needs in our community.

We express our deep appreciation to all the community residents who freely gave 3 hours to this important dialogue, helped us learn about our community, and offered creative solutions we could coalesce around. Your voices have inspired us!
Feedback and Next Steps

CPN is committed to creating platforms to ensure that low-income voices are included in the planning and decision-making process in Arlington County. Conversations such as the one reflected in this report are a critical first step. CPN and its partners are committed to collaborate, cooperate and coordinate to address challenges and better share information in promoting equity and access for all.

As part of this collaboration CPN was particularly interested in obtaining feedback from Arlington Public Schools (APS). We anticipate that this will be an ongoing process as we work together to help our children succeed. We are grateful for APS participation at the roundtable and for providing this initial feedback on the report:

APS greatly appreciates the opportunity to receive feedback from APS families and community members. Staff carefully reviewed the ideas highlighted in the CPN Education Roundtable report and we are pleased to report that APS is addressing much of what was shared. Our challenge is ensuring that families and stakeholders know about the strategies and resources being deployed, and we hope to work with community partners to share these resources more broadly.

- For parents who do not speak English as their native language, we have Bilingual Family Liaisons at nearly every school. Staff can also access a Language Line for languages which staff do not speak.
- Our School Board priorities include equity and inclusion. There is a new RFP out for cultural competency training to enhance the work that has been ongoing for staff and community.
- In FY 2018 and 2019, APS budgeted for and hired 24 new psychologists and social workers to support students who are feeling overwhelmed with school or with issues outside of school.
- Beyond academics, APS offers Saturday Academies for high school students, and Act II provides middle school students an opportunity to take additional elective courses after school. Many teachers stay after school to host a variety of student clubs and activities, and APS continues to offer a wide range of learning opportunities in the summer.

For those recommendations and suggestions in the CPN Roundtable report that would require increased staffing or other budget allocations, those options will need to be considered as part of the upcoming FY 2020 budget deliberations and in light of the projected $43 million funding shortfall that Arlington Public Schools may be facing in the coming year due to our significant growth in enrollment and other rising expenditures.
Going forward, APS hopes to further collaborate with CPN and other partners to ensure families are aware of the available resources we offer.

CPN will continue to update this section of the report with comments, feedback and updates from other partners and agencies mentioned in the report. We invite the community to visit the coalition's website, www.communityprogressnetwork.org for updates and opportunities for continuing engagement.